



Humans and Animals: A Relationship of Ambivalence

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“The earth has music for those who listen.”

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.”

“This our life, exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.”

~~~~ William Shakespeare

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### KEYWORDS

Animals, environment, humans, climate changes etc.

### ABSTRACT:

The discussions pertaining to the human-animal relationship have received due academic attention and become a subject of great interest. Animal Studies is an emerging and interdisciplinary area of research focusing on the relationship between humans and animals. These studies are imperative in changing the attitude of humans towards animals. The human-animal relationship is a complex and challenging one because of the similarity and dissimilarity of humans and animals, as they are attached and detached from each other. The students of animal studies are much concerned about this phenomenon of closeness and distance, as well as similarity and difference. Notwithstanding the fact that animals are an indispensable part of the environment, recent climatic changes have threatened many species of animals. Some species ceased to exist while others are on the verge of extinction. Animals share an important role in the ecosystem as well as in the biodiversity in sustaining the planet, and without them the existence of the biosphere is impossible. Animals play an indispensable role in maintaining ecosystems by various means such as pollinating, seed-dispersing, fertilizing the earth by their droppings and maintaining the food chain. This paper is an attempt to understand the role and function of animals in the short stories of Ruskin Bond.

### Introduction:

The world of Ruskin Bond shimmers with an innocence woven from Indian storytelling and European impressionism. It's a tapestry where ancient myths whisper alongside fleeting moments of beauty captured in vivid strokes (Impressions - Articles). This richness finds its source in Bond's life, a life etched with the loneliness of a fractured childhood. The yearning for paternal love and the gnawing trauma of belonging reverberate through his narratives (Impressions - Articles). But Ruskin Bond didn't let solitude suffocate him. He sought refuge in the boundless realm of books, in the comforting embrace of nature, and the uncomplicated camaraderie of children. These became the fuel for his stories — the

stories that bloomed into novels (Impressions - Articles).

Ruskin Bond's stories have shown a subtle connection between humans and animals, especially when the readers go through Adventures of Rusty and the Nature Omnibus - A Bond with Nature. They understand that Ruskin Bond wanted to show a subtle connection between man and animals (Malik). According to the author, one cannot live without the other. The author has deep affection towards nature, which could be understood from the characters of Rust and his grandfather who pets all kinds of wild and untameable animals. Whether it is a python, a squirrel or a monkey, Rusty has the experience of enjoying and spending time with all of them (Malik). Today's is a fast-paced



materialistic world where the author shows that trees are getting chopped off, the forests are getting clearer, and animals are getting poached (Ecological Concerns in the Select Short Stories of Ruskin Bond - Ignited Minds Journals). In this materialistic world, Ruskin Bond is trying to find the humble and enduring arms of nature around him but society and civilisation are filled with cruel people who are much more interested in their selfish needs rather than trying to get hold of the natural beauty and the exciting yet innocent factors connected with it (Malik).

### Philosophical Background:

For centuries, human beings were not sensitized to animal abuse. Animals were used as a means of entertainment, such as bull-fight, jallikattu, hunting for pleasure, bating, cockfight etc. The first law against animals' cruelty was made in Britain. In the twentieth century, most of the countries have made laws prohibiting the cruelty and torture of animals. But most of the laws were confined to domestic animals. By the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights at the United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) headquarters, in Paris, in 1978, animals got a new advocate for their rights. The last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed an enormous growth of animal rights movements. Many environmental groups such as Animal Liberation Front and Earth Liberation Front tried to enforce their ideology violently compelling the governments to ban these organizations.

Being an integral part of literature, animals get important space in oral and written literature. All kinds of literary genre abundantly represent animals. In literature, animals are represented for different purposes. Modern Literature, to a great extent, raises the growing environmental issues, challenges, concerns and the threat of the extinction of animal species. Literature also mirrors dominant religions and philosophies prevalent in the society:

The manner in which animals are depicted in literature often reflects the attitudes about animals embedded in cultural, religious, philosophical and scientific debates on animal rationality, the moral status of animals, animals' emotions, and their significance to human spiritual and psychological well being, among others. (Mthatiwa 11)

Most of the literary works adopt anthropocentric and anthropogenic view about animals. Few literary writers have tried to project animals' perspectives in their writings. Jeffers and Moore were great anti-anthropocentric writers. Brewster Ghiselin in the poem —Rattler, Alert (1946) observes the human reactions to snakes through snakes' perspective. The lines —the aspirate of my half-held breath/ The crushing of my weight upon the dust / My foamless heart, the blood leap at the wrist (9-11) manifest the perspective of the snake. The great American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson is also accused of portraying anthropocentric views in his book *Nature and other Essays* (1906). Fredrik Brogger says that in Thoreau's *Nature*:

Anthropocentrism is explicit and pervasive, encompassing everything from the material through the aesthetic to the moral, philosophical, and religious. Physically nature's commodities (—[b]easts, fire, water, stones, and corn) are there to —serve man (11); aesthetically the world —exists to the soul to satisfy the desire of beauty (17); and ethically —every animal function from the sponge up to Hercules, shall hint or thunder to man the laws of right and wrong, and echo the Ten Commandments. (Brogger 30-31)

Academics and activists have offered numerous views on the rights of animals. The advocates and activists working in the field of Animals' rights can be categorized into two broad sections: (a) Environmentalists and (b) Deep Ecologists. Environmentalists consider that animals are a seminal aspect of nature and should be properly taken care of. On the one hand, Environmentalists are more concerned about the survival of animals as a species and maintenance of the ecosystem as a whole. On the other hand, Deep Ecologists take individual animals as well as species into their consideration and think that animals should be treated in a gentle way without considering the profits. While Deep Ecologists consider that eating of animal flesh is wrong and unethical as well as anti-environmental, the environmentalists allow eating animals as long as it does not have a negative impact on climate change and survival of species.

### Representation of Humans:

Humans and animals form a subtle bond which gives the world a chance to understand the omniscience



between these two worlds (Exploring the World of Ruskin Bond: Themes and Techniques Unveiled | LinkedIn). In the stories of *The Adventures of Rusty and Nature Omnibus - A Bond with Nature*, humans are seen to have direct control over animals and sometimes create certain conditions for them to survive. Ruskin Bond gives humans a taste of their power over nature through technology, resource management and alteration of the habitat (Exploring the World of Ruskin Bond: Themes and Techniques Unveiled | LinkedIn). Readers could find the impact of humans on nature through Rusty's stories where the author highlighted the interconnectedness between nature, animals and human beings (Exploring the World of Ruskin Bond: Themes and Techniques Unveiled | LinkedIn). Through these stories, Ruskin Bond has shown a deep and strong connection between nature and humans.

The stories of Ruskin Bond - *The Adventures of Rusty and Nature Omnibus - A Bond with Nature*, are testaments to the transformative power of human connections (Lalwani). Bond's characters often find wonder and joy in the simple things — a breathtaking mountain vista, the warmth of a crackling fire, or the shared laughter of friends and families. This ability to appreciate the beauty in everyday life reflects a kind of omnificence that lies in recognising the extraordinary within the seemingly mundane. In *The Adventures of Rusty and Nature Omnibus - A Bond with Nature* Bond showcases the recurring theme of finding joy in simple pleasures which exemplifies the subtle aspect of human omnificence (Kumar et al.). By showcasing the extraordinary within the ordinary, Bond reminds us of the immense capacity for good within each of us, inspiring us to reach for our omnificence in the world around us.

### Representation of Animals:

Bond is quite famous for the true representation of animals in his writings. He represents animals of India especially animals of the Garhwal region quite faithfully. He writes about all kinds of animals- great or small, even lowliest kind of animals like insects and worms find a due share in his writings. The animals are real and convincing as in the introduction to *The Big Book of Animal Stories* he says that —my animals are real animals, and they behave as animals usually do. It's really the humans who do strange things. Animals

are predictable. Humans, never (02). He confesses that his animal stories are more for the demand for this kind of books in the market. As he says that —I thought, why not write a few myself? India was full of birds and animals, reptiles and insects, so why not put them into my stories? (02). Thus, he produces a lot of animal stories which were sent all over the world for publication and many of them were republished in book forms:

My tiger cubs, pythons, panthers, hornbills, chameleons, baby elephants, monkeys, white mice, frogs, crows and crocodiles, all turned up in Australia (*The School Magazine*), the USA (*Highlights for Children and Cricket*), Scotland (*Blackwoods*), England (*The Lady*) and in most of our own Sunday supplements. (*The Big Book of Animal Stories* 2)

Birds occupy a very important position in the writings of Bond. The twittering and chirping of the birds are important elements of his stories. His treatment of birds is very affable and friendly. He is conscious of the disappearance of birds from the scene. The stories like —Harold: Our Hornbill, —Owls in the Family, —A Crow for all Seasons, —The Eye of the Eagle and —Grandpa Fights an Ostrich are exclusively related to the birds, their habitats and behaviors. —Romi and the Wildfire, —Angry River and many more stories give emphasis on birds, the disappearance of their habitats and destruction and extinction of their species in the wake of industrial development and environmental destruction.

Bond's portrayal of animal omnificence fosters a deep emotional connection between the reader and the animal characters which brings out their loyalty, and vulnerability and evokes empathy along with admiration which helps enrich the overall reading experience (Devi and College Bangalore). The presence of animals with seemingly supernatural abilities raises profound philosophical questions about our place in the Universe, the existence of higher intelligence, and the interconnectedness of all living beings. Ultimately, Bond's animal omnificence serves as a celebration of the harmonious balance between humans and nature (Devi and College Bangalore). Their presence adds depth, symbolism, and emotional resonance, making his stories not just captivating adventures but also profound meditations on the human condition and our place within the natural world.



## Human-Animal Relationship:

The relationship of humans with animals is very complex. On the one hand, they are slaughtered and eaten as food, on the other hand, they are worshipped. Pagan religions deified and worshipped animals. The philosophy of karma and reincarnation believe that after death, humans may be transformed into animals and vice versa. This concept is known as metempsychosis. In Hindu philosophy, animals are considered sacred. In Hindu mythology, various gods and goddesses are associated with different animals; sometimes as their vehicles, so worthy of worship. In this view, Abrey Manning and James Serpell say:

Animals have been worshipped as gods, reviled as evil spirits, endowed with souls, or regarded as mindless machines. They have been killed for food with careful respect but also slaughtered for sport. Whilst some species have been objects of terror or loathing, others have been taken into our homes and treated as if human themselves. (qtd. in Mthathiwa 4-5)

The human-animal relationship is a very important aspect of the writings of Ruskin Bond. He considers animals as an inseparable part of the environment. The relationship between humans and animals, more often than not, is based on mutual trust and harmony but sometimes there is antagonism and mistrust. Ruskin Bond shows two types of relationships friendly and antagonistic.

In many stories he has discussed the dispute between human and animals. "A Tiger in the House" talks about the need for trust and love in a human-animal relationship. The narrator in the story "All Creatures Great and Small" emphasizes love and compassion towards animals, as he says:

Instead of having brothers and sisters to grow up within India, I had as my companions an odd assortment of pets, which included a monkey, a tortoise, a python and a Great Indian Hornbill. (Essential Collections for Young Readers 25)

Bond's stories refute some of these misconstructions. People ascribe many characteristics to the animals based on false observation or fake reports like misconceptions about chameleons which are supposed to poison the people only by spitting from twenty feet away. Many persons consider it to be a very dangerous

animal. In the story —Henry: A Chameleon, Bond mentions —Someone claimed that the chameleon could poison people twenty feet away, simply by spitting at them. The residents of the area had risen up in arms (An Island of Trees 26). Bond debunks this erroneous belief and represents chameleons as harmless creatures. They are not capable of harming anyone. Despite human beings' closeness, they have a sense of distance from animals.

## Conclusion:

Ruskin Bond represents animals of India especially the animals of Garhwal region. He writes about all kinds of animals great and small. The animals of his stories are authentic and convincing. He also dispels many misconceptions spun around animals prevalent in the society. Sometimes, he adopts the device of anthropomorphism or uses animals as symbols and metaphors. He shows both harmonious and antagonistic relationship between humans and animals. —All Creatures Great and Small, —The Tunnel, —Koki's Song, —Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright and many others displays a relationship of love and harmony between humans and animals. On the other hand —Panther's Moon, —The Tiger in the Tunnel, —The Monkeys, —The Eye of the Eagle and other stories show a relationship of antagonism and enmity between humans and animals. The extinction of species is one of the major concerns found in his short stories. He blames various activities such as poaching, hunting, wildfire, developmental projects, urbanisation and climate change for this problem. Depletion of natural habitats and extinction of species are also major concerns found in his writings.

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